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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BUCHAREST 000337

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [CVIS](#) [RO](#)  
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR MEETS NEW FOREIGN MINISTER COMANESCU: A  
PROUD STRATEGIC PARTNER

REF: BUCHAREST 0293

Classified By: CDA ai. Mark A. Taplin; Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: During the Ambassador's April 25 courtesy call on newly-appointed Romanian Foreign Minister Lazar Comanescu, the Minister underscored his interest in developing a close, personal relationship with the Ambassador as well as his intent to put special emphasis on building a stronger economic and commercial dimension to the U.S.-Romanian strategic partnership. Comanescu thanked the Ambassador for emphasizing Romania's dynamic economy, for attracting American business, and for leading the effort on retaining and nurturing Romania's critical intellectual talent. Comanescu also committed to working with the U.S. on improving Romania's visa rejection numbers, and opening wider opportunities for Romania to qualify under the Visa Waiver Program. The new FM appears to be off to a good start. End Summary.

¶2. (C) During the Ambassador's April 25 courtesy call on newly-installed Foreign Minister Lazar Comanescu, the FM said he was "a blunt person." Rather than exchanging mere pleasantries about the U.S.-Romanian strategic partnership, he wanted to thank the Ambassador for focusing attention on building a pragmatic, economic dimension into the bilateral relationship. He noted that he was the Deputy Foreign Minister when Romania and the U.S. started down this path, and was part of the "launching" of the Strategic Partnership 11 years ago. He said he would like to think that he had made a contribution that allowed for attracting companies like Ford to Romania and, as an economist at heart, he wanted to celebrate the excellent U.S. relationship at all levels. It was a relationship which was not confined to just Presidents Bush and Basescu, but expressed also in the ever-evolving strategic dialogue on trade, investments, and commercial interests, on the cultural and sociological sides, as well as in military cooperation. "We are proud of this," he exclaimed.

¶3. (C) Comanescu said that he fully agreed with the Ambassador's observation about making sure Romania invests in infrastructure and its people, especially to reverse the "brain drain." He is optimistic that as the Romanian economy improves, so will the quality of the visa applicants; a lower number of Romanians will be seeking opportunities elsewhere. Comanescu noted that the news media does not understand this, but what happened in Spain, for example, will happen in Romania; Romanians who have left for economic reasons will return as the environment improves. It was essential that the Romanian authorities make clear that there is a future here in Romania, he added, and that was another reason why he wanted to thank the Ambassador for consistently making that very point. "I only wish other embassies would make the same case," Comanescu said. He pointed out that if the Prime

Minister or the President tells people to stay in Romania and invest in its future, it does not matter as much as when it comes from the U.S. Ambassador.

14. (C) Along those lines, he also raised what he called the psychological dimension of the visa waiver program for Romanians in particular; it was important to get results as soon as possible.. Comanescu asked for the Embassy's help to get Romanian citizens to understand what needs to be done to reduce Romania's high rate of refusals. The Ambassador noted that the rate will go down as Romania's EU membership lengthens, and other opportunities expand. The Ambassador also briefed the FM on the recent visit of DHS Assistant Secretary Barth. Comanescu underscored the need for

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Romanians to understand what is required to qualify for a visa and to fulfill those commitments before they request a visa. He expressed appreciation for the USG efforts to improve the visa situation in Romania. "We cannot ask for more than what you can do under the law," he added.

15. (C) Shifting to other matters, Comanescu said that Romania took on commitments in the Middle East and the Balkans because it is a genuine partner and is devoted to the partnership with the U.S., but also because these things are in Romania's national interests. He added that Romania wants to ensure the U.S. knows it is a reliable, credible and predictable partner. Comanescu noted that moving forward together on the commercial side is important not just for Romania and the U.S. but also for the EU, including in the Black Sea region. He called the Black Sea a bridge, and said that Romania needs to learn to do in the region what the USG does with "SEED" money; "small is beautiful!" he exclaimed. We have much work to do together, he concluded.

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16. (C) Comment: Comanescu's comments sounded sincere enough. We were encouraged by his very positive statements about the close U.S.-Romania partnership. At the same time, the Minister is likely an interim figure, whose tenure will probably not outlast the naming of a new Government following parliamentary elections in late fall. An experienced career diplomat, his approach should be more cautious and less gaffe-prone than was Cioroianu's. Basescu's foreign policy advisor told us candidly before the Easter break that she had already had to remind the new Minister that there were other foreign policy priorities than those articulated in Brussels, where Comanescu has spent most of the last decade. She stressed that Basescu's public comments at Comanescu's swearing-in about the unchanged strategic emphasis for Romanian foreign policy were intended "for one person, and one person alone" -- namely Comanescu. "He was the right man, for a very specific and limited moment," she explained; none of the Ministry's rising stars wanted to bankrupt their prospects for a full term as Foreign Minister by accepting the job now. "Comanescu's at the end of his career; the position of Minister will be a good way to top it off," she said. End Comment.

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